UNITED NATIONS **S**

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1999/11
6 January 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 6 JANUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a copy of a statement delivered on 5 January 1999 by Ato Seyoum Mesfin, Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, at a briefing organized for members of the diplomatic community at Addis Ababa on the Eritrean aggression and on its rejection of the peace proposal by the Organization of African Unity (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador

99-00270 (E) 070199

/...

Annex

Statement made by Ato Seyoum Mesfin, Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, at a briefing organized for members of the diplomatic community at Addis Ababa on the Eritrean aggression and on its rejection of the peace proposal by the Organization of African Unity

It is now almost eight months since the Eritrean aggression against Ethiopia and since the forceful occupation of Ethiopian territory by Eritrea.

Eritrea can be said to have committed two types of crime. The first crime is related to the totally unexpected invasion and occupation of our territory on 12 May 1998 and to various atrocities committed by Eritrea, ranging from indiscriminate air strikes against civilians to the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of our compatriots from occupied Ethiopian territory.

The second crime that has been committed by the Eritrean authorities involves the disdain that they have shown towards efforts at peacemaking and towards attempts made to assist the two parties to avoid war and achieve peace. This latter crime is no less grave and no less brutal, because essentially by closing all avenues for peace the Eritrean authorities appear to have decided to impose an unwanted war on the people of Ethiopia, who had hoped until seven months ago that the country's history of war would be behind us and that these would be years for making up for lost time.

The Eritrean authorities continue to commit both types of crime. By continuing to occupy Ethiopian territory and by continuing to violate Ethiopia's sovereignty, they have decided to continue committing crime against our people. On the other hand, their refusal to give peace a chance has also continued, as can be seen very vividly from their response to the latest peace proposal by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) - a response which is devoid of any seriousness and which is essentially designed as a public relations ploy calculated to confuse and to keep the Eritrean rejection of the peace proposal as ambiguous as possible. The fact that the Eritrean authorities are thus continuing to commit a crime by killing all chances for peace is quite obvious and can hardly be missed by observers with any sense of objectivity.

We are at a very critical turning point in this crisis imposed on us by the authorities in Eritrea. The diplomatic effort is clearly stymied by Eritrean obduracy and intransigence. Not for the first time.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Eritrea has always been consistent throughout this crisis in one thing - in rejecting all peace proposals and in trying to wreck peace efforts, either through attempts at discrediting facilitation exercises as a whole or through attempts at tarnishing the credibility of individuals involved in the process of peacemaking.

The first peace proposal rejected by Eritrea - as is well known by now - was the one proposed by the United States of America and Rwanda. After having said "No" to the results of the United States-Rwandese facilitation, whose good offices Eritrea had initially accepted willingly, Eritrea made it known that it

would be happier with OAU assuming the role of peacemaker. But when the OAU summit at Ouagadougou on 10 June 1998 adopted a resolution appealing to the two parties to accept the proposal made by the United States and Rwanda, Eritrea said "No" once again, insisting that it was prepared to accept only a new process to be initiated by OAU, spearheaded by a high-level delegation of OAU heads of State originally set up to ensure and follow up the implementation of the 10 June OAU summit resolution.

Eritrea indeed had its way, and the OAU high-level delegation had to start its work from scratch, which involved the setting up of committees at an ambassadorial and ministerial level to look into the genesis of the crisis and into whether an aggression had taken place. Doing so was necessary because the Eritrean authorities were lying shamelessly by maintaining that the occupied Ethiopian territories were Eritrean and had always been administered by Eritrea.

We knew what the results of the OAU investigation would be, as the Eritrean authorities also did. That is why they wanted to stop the Ambassadorial Committee from investigating who had been administering Badme before the 12 May 1998 invasion of the locality by Eritrean forces. But OAU stood its ground despite the Eritrean insistence on the need to change the terms of reference of the Ambassadorial Committee. An account of this is to be found in black and white in the report by the high-level delegation to the summit of the OAU Central Organ.

The findings of the Ambassadorial Committee were unambiguous. They proved the Eritrean aggression without a shadow of doubt, and these formed the basis for the approaches made to the two parties by the high-level delegation at a ministerial level on 1 and 2 August 1998 at Ouagadougou.

It was thus after exhaustive and extensive work at various levels that the OAU peace plan was eventually submitted to the two parties by the high-level delegation at a summit level on 7 and 8 November 1998.

Ethiopia, whose delegation was led by our Prime Minister, accepted the proposal ad referendum immediately and on the spot, after the clarification that it sought was provided, and its formal and definitive acceptance of the proposal was communicated to the Chairman of the high-level delegation three days later.

On the other hand, Eritrea would not even acknowledge that there was in fact a peace proposal put on the table by OAU. It continued to refer to the OAU peace proposal as "talking points" until the convening of the OAU summit of the Central Organ for Conflict Resolution on 17 and 18 December 1998, to which the high-level delegation was expected to submit its report.

I am deliberately avoiding talking about the attempt made by Eritrea to destroy the work and the credibility of the high-level delegation and its individual members, as earlier it had tried the same to tarnish the credibility of the Secretary-General of OAU.

However, it is vital to talk about what the Eritrean authorities tried to do immediately before the Ouagadougou summit of the Central Organ and at the summit itself, and what they have been doing since. In this regard, nothing

shows the lack of seriousness of the Eritrean authorities concerning the peace efforts by OAU and the contempt they have for OAU more than the set of questions that, in the manner of a school master addressing students, they delivered to OAU on 12 December 1998, emphasizing that their response to the peace proposal would be contingent on replies by OAU to those 32 or so questions, most of which are manifestly odd and bizarre.

Then came the message on 15 December 1998 by the Eritrean President to the Chairman of the high-level delegation, whose contents were repeated two days later by the Eritrean leader in his statement before the summit of the Central Organ. The core message of both was a request for OAU to amend the core proposals put on the table by OAU calling on Eritrea to withdraw from occupied Ethiopian territory and for the restoration of the status quo ante. Predictably, that Eritrean request for amendment, which in fact amounted to a counter proposal, was rejected by the summit, and the peace proposal of the high-level delegation was endorsed by the summit, which also called for a speedy implementation of the plan. End of story.

That is where we are as far as OAU's attempt at brokering peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea is concerned. OAU has placed its proposal on the table and has called for its speedy implementation. Ethiopia has accepted the proposal; Eritrea continues to talk about amendments - as earlier it had talked about "talking points" - aimed at the core issue, which involves its withdrawal from Ethiopian territory and the return of the Ethiopian administration.

This is the situation at present as far as Eritrea's disposition for peace is concerned. It is by no means far from the truth to say that Eritrea is being allowed to get away with murder and publicly and successfully to kill all diplomatic opportunities for peacefully resolving the crisis - a crisis that it created and imposed on Ethiopia. Will the Eritrean authorities continue to be allowed by the international community to deny our people and theirs peace, and to make a mockery of all peace efforts as well?

We as a Government have kept out promises to our people and to the international community. We have said at the beginning of the crisis that we would exhaust all opportunities for resolving the crisis peacefully, giving first priority to this method of resolving the problem. We have done this in a scrupulous manner and with all the necessary good will.

But it must by now have become clear to any objective observer that Ethiopia has no partner for peacemaking in this crisis. Under these circumstances, there can hardly be anything more that could be expected of Ethiopia. The ball is squarely in the Eritrean court.

Obviously, others might also have to ask themselves whether they have done enough for peace and to put the required pressure to bear on Eritrea, which is clearly the aggressor, the intransigent party and the party which is not prepared to give peace a chance.

The talk about the Eritrean authorities being immune to pressure is unconvincing. What they need is to be talked to in the language they understand. They might listen and they will listen if there are clear

indications that, among other things, their pockets would also be affected. The first step is to admit that treating Eritrea with kid gloves and shying away from calling a spade a spade has not worked and has only encouraged the Eritrean authorities to persist in their defiance, intransigence and rudeness towards both individuals and institutions, and towards those who have anything to do with the effort for peace in this crisis.

We all recall, in this regard, what we were told and what we were assured at the beginning of this crisis. It was said that we should exercise maximum restraint. It was emphasized that OAU should be given the opportunity to make war unnecessary for reversing aggression. We and OAU were promised that once OAU took a position and put a peace proposal on the table, then all would stand behind OAU with resolve, and whoever was the aggressor would be told with no ambiguity that aggression cannot and will not pay. That this has not been done long after OAU has spoken in no ambiguous terms about who the aggressor is and after it had presented its peace proposal is indeed a source of disappointment and surprise. In fact, that partly explains why Eritrea has defied all peace efforts and is now defying the Organization of African Unity. Accordingly, it is now only what those who are in a position to bring effective and meaningful pressure to bear on Eritrea are prepared to do which will decide whether there is hope for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Otherwise, the peace effort can be considered as good as dead. We therefore call on the international community, in fulfilment of its obligation to international law, for the respect of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and by way of delivering on promises made, to put whatever meaningful and effective pressure is available to them on Eritrea so that OAU may succeed in its effort and diplomacy may have a chance.

This is why I said earlier that we are at present at a critical period of this seven-month crisis created by the Eritrean aggression. Ethiopia awaits the response of the international community, without which no one should have any illusion that there will be a positive response from Eritrea.